BEAR RIVER WORKING GROUP
NATURAL RESOURCE ISSUES INTERIM COMMITTEE
Preston, Idaho
April 27, 2004
7 p.m.

The meeting of the Bear River Working Group was chaired by Senator Robert L. Geddes. Chairman Geddes called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. and explained that the Natural Resource Interim Committee was formed as a result of legislation passed during the last legislative session in response to water emergencies brought about by the seven year drought. He emphasized the importance of the Prior Appropriation Doctrine-first in time-first in right. Chairman Geddes stated that these meetings are open to all-irrigators, mayors, elected officials, industry, and the general public. All interested parties are invited and encouraged to attend. Representatives Bedke and Bradford who are also members of this Working Group were unable to be present. Representative Langford acted as scribe.

HELEN HARRINGTON, Idaho Department of Water Resources, was the first presenter. She explained the importance of ground water dynamics to the Bear River Basin. Surface water users are concerned by well drilling and the effect it is having on river flows. She stated that there is a need for new ground rules and possibly the formation of a Bear River Rental pool.

KARL DREHER, Director, Idaho Department of Water Resources, was the second presenter. He presented background information and explained that changes in methods of irrigation and deep wells have had a dramatic effect on the aquifer. He said that the situation has been building for years. Ground water level were higher during the 1950s and '60s because of surface irrigation. This is particularly apparent at Thousand Springs at Hagerman where the discharge was 4,200 cubic feet per second in the early 1900s. This increased to 6,800 cubic feet per second by 1950, and has declined to 5,200 cfs today. There have been significant declines in the discharge since 2001. This led to priority calls for water. This year it became obvious that a crisis had been reached that could have a 750 million dollar impact to the economy. The Idaho Legislature passed emergency legislation to deal with the situation.

The Bear River Basin will face a similar situation. This is the seventh year of drought. Prior surface rights must be honored. Referring to the Twin Lakes proposal, Director Dreher said it is difficult to develop a new main stem reservoir. He suggested as an alternative cooperation with the Wasatch Front to raise the present Oneida Reservoir-providing an additional 50 to 80,000 acre feet of storage. Assuming that Bear Lake is above 5,902 feet, water would be released from Bear Lake to replenish releases from Oneida. Director Dreher said that we are facing both a challenge and an opportunity.

RODNEY WALLENTINE, Commissioner, Bear River Commission, was the third presenter. Discussing managing the Bear River Compact, he said substantially: At one time Bear Lake was flooding. It will come back. Any new dams belong upstream to

benefit all Idaho users.

CONNELY BALDWIN, Water Resources Engineer, PacifiCorp, discussing Bear River and Bear Lake Water Outlook-2004, stated that this year, PacifiCorp is expecting to provide only 35% of allocations. Over the years, Bear Lake has provided a buffer. He said that this year mirrors 1935. In the spring of 1936, Bear Lake raised six feet in elevation.

DOUG FOSS, Clear Springs Foods, Inc., addressed spring flow needs in the Bear River Basin. His aquiculture company is a trout farm, producing Idaho trout for market. The operation at Soda Springs provides the eggs, which are hatched and raised at Buhl. They purchased 1941 water rights to provide the large amount of water required for their operation. They now receive less than 50% of the water they thought they owned. They pump oxygen into the water. They can't meet their company's egg needs.

NEAL LARSEN, Mayor City of Preston, expressed the concerns of growing municipalities. He said that they need to manage what they have better, deal with leakage problems. They need a second source of water, more conservation.

TRENT CLARK, Monsanto Government Relations, explained why an industrial water supply is needed. He said that Monsanto spends millions of dollars in monitoring water. They have sixty monitoring wells. The water they are using comes from deep underground-water that has not seen the light of day for 1,400 years. Monsanto uses large quantities of water to meet clean air standards. Likewise, large quantities of water are used for cooling. Their operation provides 800 jobs with a payroll of 160 million dollars.

Chairman Geddes concluded by saying, "We have a lot of work to do!" and announced that there will be a Natural Resource meeting in Boise on May 6th. He then opened the meeting to remarks or questions from the audience.

CLAUDIA COTTLE, Bear Lake Watch, commented that this must be done within the confines of the environment.

GEORGE REAM, Idaho Water Users, asked a question regarding a dam above Bear Lake, and how this would be handled under the Compact.

KARL DREHER responded that Idaho has 125,000 acre feet of storage below Bear Lake. We would not be in compliance with the Compact if the dam were located in the Central Division.

CLAIR CHEIRRETT expressed the opinion that the cycle will return. The springs will come up. We do have to plan.

TOM LOERTSCHER, Candidate for State Representative, asked if due to the lack of flood irrigation, will the springs ever come back?

KARL DREHER stated that lots of things have happened. We didn't have the Endangered Species Act. We didn't have 420,000 acre feet of water going downstream, in his opinion, in a futile attempt to flush fish. Discharge-depletions-It can be stabilized. We can't get all the way back.

BILL HANDY: Asked a question regarding re-licensing of downstream dams. How do we look at the entire thing as a unified system?

JERRY RIGBY, Chairman, Idaho Water Resource Board, commented that his group stands ready, willing, and able to give assistance.

EULALIE LANGFORD, State Representative, District 31, stated that flood control above Bear Lake would save valuable water. When the irrigation season ends with Bear Lake above 5,918 feet above sea level, water is released downstream for flood control. This has been occurring since 1970 and happened as recently as 1997, '98, and '99. During those years, the run-of-the-river was not stored and went downstream also. All of that water went to Great Salt Lake. A Corps of Engineers study would determine how much water would now be in Bear Lake if releases since 1970 had not occurred. This study would also indicate the best location for flood control above Bear Lake.

The meeting adjourned at 9 p.m.